

A Visit by Mrs. Nixon and Friends

By Donnie Radcliffe

CARACAS, Venezuela—First Lady Pat Nixon's entourage for her official visits to Venezuela and Brazil this week has aroused curiosity and some veiled criticism on its own.

Traveling with Mrs. Nixon are a relatively unknown Miami businessman, Nicholas Morley, and CIA deputy director Gen. Vernon Walters. Walters is acting as her interpreter, a role he also played in 1958 when then-Vice President Richard Nixon and his wife were surrounded by violent Venezuelan demonstrators.

In remarks to American reporters, Mrs. Nixon has downplayed the seriousness of the 1958 incident and Walters appeared to do the same at a reception Monday night at Miraflores Palace.

Walters, unmistakable as a U.S. Army general in his military uniform with its three gold stars, said "It (1958) wasn't that bad."

Walters himself is being viewed warily by some Americans on the scene for his CIA affiliation. And there are some among the U.S. Embassy staff who visibly wince at the sight of Walters' uniform.

"In some other Latin American countries he would not be very welcome," according to one veteran hemispheric observer. "But things have changed here and nobody's making anything out of it."

There is also some behind-the-scenes dismay that the official U.S. delegation to the inauguration of Venezuela's new president, Carlos Andres Perez, is comprised of anybody less than Vice President Gerald R.

Ford or Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.).

"Venezuela is very important to the United States," said one American, "and we shouldn't ever forget why—oil."

Besides Mrs. Nixon, the official party includes U.S. Ambassador Robert McClintock and Morley, the Miami mystery man.

A native of Bulgaria who emigrated by way of Italy and Israel to the United States in 1956, Morley became a U.S. citizen in 1961. Other than vague references by White House officials to Morley's extensive business interests, in South America as well as the United States and elsewhere, little is known about him.

On the flight aboard Air Force One from Homestead

Air Force Base in Florida, Mrs. Nixon told reporters that Morley had been recommended to the White House by Sen. Edward Gurney (R-Fla.) for the slot in the delegation.

She said that Gurney proposed Morley because of his "interest in South America and throughout the world. He's known for his civic work."

Morley, who somewhat resembles musician Al Hirt, has pretty much kept to himself. He showed up Monday night to present his credentials with those of Mrs. Nixon and Ambassador McClintock to outgoing President Rafael Caldera. But he was mildly critical of what he called "last-minute champagne served the way it was" to Mrs. Nixon himself and McClintock.

Yesterday, however, at the actual inaugural ceremony, Morley was not to be seen. White House and State Department officials called it an "off day" for the 45-year-old Miamiian who is president of a realty company and, reportedly, an acquaintance of Bebe Rebozo, the close friend of President Nixon.

At a party last night at the U.S. Embassy, Mrs. Nixon stood with the McClintocks to receive some 200 Venezuelan civic and government leaders, as well as American businessmen living in Caracas. Coming through the line was Morley, who had said earlier in the day that he was not going to attend.

"As long as I can breathe," Morley said, "I have to be here. This is the

greatest occasion of my life —after this it's down hill."

Morley arrived with considerable fanfare, claiming that he needed the attention of Dr. Walter Tkach, the White House physician. He disappeared upstairs and shortly thereafter reappeared carrying two small packets of prescription pills. He mingled gallantly with the guests including Pierre Salinger, former press secretary to President John F. Kennedy.

Salinger came with his wife Nicole, flying here Sunday from Paris at the invitation of Venezuela's new president.

"I'm a friend of the president's," Salinger announced to reporters, who used to take briefings from him at the White House. "It's the best way to come to an inauguration."

Salinger said he felt he "first drew a blank" from Mrs. Nixon on who he was when he came through the line. When he told her who he was and that he was living in Paris, she responded with an "Oh, oh, oh," he said.

Of Perez, he said that the 51-year-old president is "very (John F.) Kennedy oriented—Kennedy's his real hero." Salinger met Perez in 1961 when he was preparing for JFK's trip to Venezuela and has kept in touch ever since.

Gen. Walters, out of uniform at the party, stood on the embassy residence veranda looking down at the lights of Caracas below him and recalled that he had first seen that city in 1948 when it was "still a colonial village—none of these skyscrapers were here."